

Keeping 'Em Flying

HAWAII's 193rd Aviation Intermediate Maintenance Battalion — part of the 45th Corps Support Group — boasts a work force of unusually experienced mechanics. Some of the unit's members have as much as 30 years' experience.

Longevity with the unit is possible because each member is either a full-time Hawaii Army National Guard technician or a Civil Service employee who's also a member of the Guard unit, said 2LT Evelyn Burns, a spokeswoman for the Hawaii Army National Guard.

"It's a setup that allows us to provide the best maintenance services to aviation units on Oahu, primarily to the 214th Aviation Regiment and 68th Medical Company," said aircraft mechanic and altitude shop supervisor SFC Jay Higa. On drill weekends, he doubles as the maintenance operations platoon sergeant.

The 193rd originated in 1966 with 19 full-time people. Today it numbers 38 full-time employees. And on drill weekends, the number reaches about 50, Higa said.

The "intermediate" part of the unit's title is significant because it refers to its position in the maintenance-shop hierarchy.

What an aviation unit can't fix with its own resources comes to the AVIMS. "If we can't perform required maintenance here, the parts from CH-47D Chinooks and UH-60A Black Hawks would have to be shipped to the mainland for

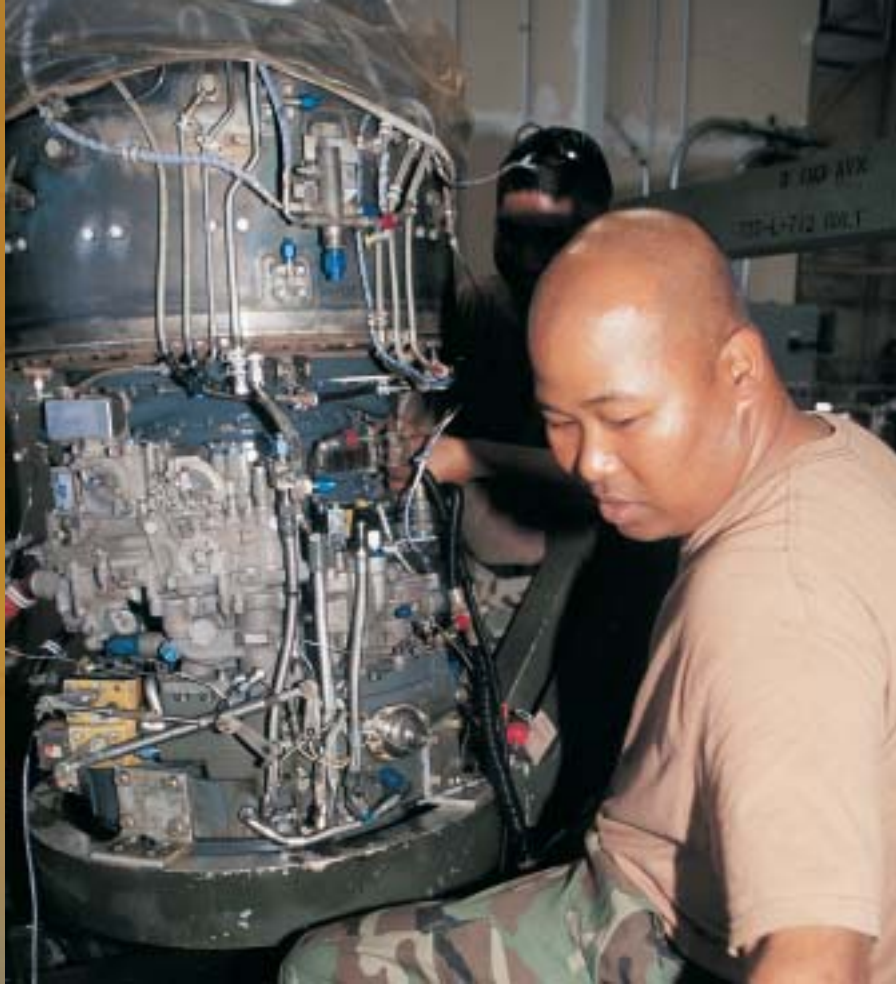


in Hawaii

Story and Photos by Heike Hasenauer



The 193rd's SFC Gregory DeCosta (left), SSG Maurice Aquino (center) and SSG Wendell Costa work on the hydraulic system of a UH-60 Black Hawk.



Full-time AGR technician SPC Robert Saludares replaces an engine compressor on a CH-47 Chinook.

repair,” said production control clerk SSG Elizabeth Vidrick. “That would cost considerably more time and money.”

From August 2001 to August 2002 unit members completed some 1,300 work orders and logged some 44,000 man-hours, Vidrick said.

“The work orders covered everything from regular maintenance — such as inspecting wheel bearings, axles and rotor blades — to rebuilding engines,” said SPC John Oliveros.

The highest number of work orders come into the avionics and radar repair shop, said SFC Ronald Oshiba.

Countermeasures components, transponders, navigation equipment and automatic-flight computers all fall under that shop’s jurisdiction, as do night-vision goggles, said SPC Daryl Nakamura, an avionics and radar repair specialist.

SGT Roger Goodwin, a full-time Guard technician who once worked aboard a University of Hawaii research vessel, joined the unit to “get into something more secure,” he said, “and to be able to go home every night, versus being at sea for months at a time.”

As a propeller and rotor mechanic, he conducts routine scheduled inspections to detect stress cracks, among other things. It’s a science unto itself, he said. To eliminate the possibility of any such cracks in an aircraft frame, he employs ultrasound, X-ray, florescent-penetrant and magnetic-particle-display technologies.

Among the mechanics’ other jobs are tearing down rotor-head systems, replacing seals and bearings, and testing pressure systems, Goodwin said.

“We try to build a lot of compo-

nents ahead of time, so we can be like a gas station,” said SSG Allan Kapunia. “A unit can bring equipment in and get it back quickly.”

The unit’s maintenance hangar at Wheeler Army Airfield, on Oahu, can accommodate seven aircraft at a time, said Kapunia.

The aircraft mechanics undergo a year and a half of training at Fort Eustis, Va., to work on aircraft engines, for example. “And we train active-duty soldiers, who may spend four hours per day working on aircraft, compared to our eight, because they have ‘other duties as assigned.’ We concentrate on aviation maintenance,” said the Hawaiian-born Kapunia.

“As a member of the National Guard, I not only get to live in my home state, I get to deploy to places active-duty soldiers deploy to — such as the Joint Readiness Training Center in Louisiana and to exercises in places like Thailand,” he said.

SFC Gregory DeCosta has been doing this type of work for 38 years,



Aircraft electrician SGT Simeon Rojas performs a regular maintenance check on an aircraft battery.



“Our satisfaction comes from knowing we’re checking out every detail to ensure pilots and crews are safe.”

he said, 30 years as a full-time member of the National Guard.

Aircraft electrician SGT Simeon Rojas services batteries, first by discharging their voltage to zero, so he won’t get shocked, then cleaning and recharging them.

“We do capacity tests, to ensure all the battery’s cells function at capacity,” Rojas said. It’s what powers the forward-looking infrared radar system, the master caution panel and the aircraft’s instrument system.

Before any serviced aircraft is returned to its unit, quality-assurance specialists like SGT Roy Nitta perform intensive tests, including an engine-turbine rotor check. Before a new or serviced engine is put into the aircraft, “we give it a ‘run cell’ test,” Nitta said.

The engine runs for 12 hours to

ensure it works properly, he said. Then maintenance test pilot CW3 Glenn Hirata takes to the air to verify its airworthiness.

“The aircraft we’ve serviced have never been involved in an accident,” said quality-assurance inspector CW2 Warnee Bagay, “and they never will.”

“Our satisfaction comes from knowing we’re checking out every detail to ensure pilots and crews are safe,” he said. In doing so, “we play a role in the success of aviation units’ missions in Hawaii – that is to help the island’s citizens by helping to extinguish seasonal brush fires and provide aeromedical evacuation services to accident victims.” □

Avionics and radar-repair specialist SPC Daryl Nakamura tests a pair of night-vision goggles.



Cooperation on any task — large or small — is one of the key’s to the 193rd’s continuing success.